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ABSTRACT

This paper is a case study of Kentucky's attempt to fix not only failing schools but a failing public school system. It reports on the policy making and implementation conundrums of the debate over Kentucky's high stakes accountability system. As a political policy analysis, the study relies on documents, media reports, and interviews with key players to expand understanding of the issues. The paper reports primary and secondary focus group and interview data from a variety of professional educators and parents. The combined frameworks of political culture and authentic policy perspectives are useful for depicting the story of Kentucky's debate over accountability and assessment. Political culture emerges as a defining influence on Kentucky's educational accountability debate. What becomes of assessment and accountability in Kentucky remains to be seen, but it is apparent that fixing failing schools has enormous political overtones. However, the power of professional culture must not be underestimated in this equation. An appendix contains the statement of principles from the Kentucky Task Force on Education Reform. (Contains 89 references.) (SLD)

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"HASN'T ANYONE ELSE DONE THIS RIGHT?": A FIELD NOTE ON THE POLITICAL REALITIES AND PERCEPTIONS IN MODIFYING KENTUCKY'S HIGH STAKES ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

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This is a story about complexity amidst demands for simplicity. It is a documentation of legislative attempts at fairness in a climate of political competition and cultural disparity. Most of all, this is a singular case study of one state's attempt to fix, not only failing schools, but also a failing public school system (Combs, 1991; Dove, 1991; Lindle, 1995, 1998a). This story reiterates the policy making and implementation conundrum of political interpretation (Cibulka & Derlin, 1998; Education Commission of the States, 1998). As this paper reports an ongoing political and educational debate, the results are inevitably transient. Hence this paper is by nature, more of a field note on the story than a conclusion to it.

Objectives or Purposes

Kentucky's high stakes accountability system has generated considerable interest nationally (Abelman & Elmore, 1999; Abelman & Kenyon, 1996; Cornett & Gaines, 1997; Education Commission of the States, 1998; Elmore, Siskin & Carnoy, 1998; Fenster, 1996; Fuhrman, 1999; Jones & Whitford, 1997; Kean, 1996; King & Mathers, 1997; Millman, 1997; Mintrop, in press; O'Day, 1998; Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Erikson, Gabrys, Haigh, Trimble & Gong, 1996) and as will be documented in this paper, considerable debate within the commonwealth. Educational accountability as a political discourse has a fairly long and intense history (Education Commission of the States, 1997). Kentucky's systemic interpretation of accountability has added a new chapter to that history. The current revisions demand documentation (e.g., Petrosko, 1997). The purpose of this paper is to clarify the positions and perspectives in the Kentucky debate in order to document its progress. This paper is an analytic record designed to preserve the

competing demands of Kentucky's political history and culture in the larger fifty states' and national debate over effective educational reform and accountability systems.

Perspectives

Since the 1970s, individual states have attempted to define and measure effective education (Education Commission of the States, 1997). While some policy analysts have focused on the form and function of accountability, this paper reviews Kentucky's debate within the various political cultures of the profession, the state legislature and the commonwealth's various regions. The analysis combines two frameworks for analyzing the political field of policy making and implementation: (1) political cultures (Elazar, 1984, 1994) and (2) an interpretive perspective on policy implementation (Cibulka & Derlin, 1998). Following is a brief overview of each perspective.

Political Culture and Kentucky

Elazar's (1984, 1994) depiction of American political culture is based on assumptions about social values embedded in religion, national origin, and U.S. emigration and migration patterns. Kentucky's demographics lends itself to this model of cultural analysis of politics because it ranks fourth among the 50 states in population stability. More than 77% of its 3.7 million citizens were born in Kentucky (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990). Furthermore, while parts of Kentucky are enjoying a surge of in-migration boosting its economic development, the state remains singularly racially homogenous[1] (Kentucky State Data Center, 1995; U.S. Census Bureau, 1998). Given these demographics, Kentucky's temporal and geographic history is culturally relevant to a "supermajority" of its citizens.

Within Elazar's framework, Kentucky's social structure, history, and demographics are highly relevant for explaining its political activities (Elazar, 1984, 1994; Miller, 1994). Admitted to the U.S. as the 15th state in 1792, much of its current population harbors pioneer values derived from being an early U.S. westward frontier (Caudill, 1963, 1969; Clark, 1968,1992; Clark & Kirkpatrick, 1949; Miller, 1994).

[1] In 1990, the white population represented 92% of Kentucky's citizens. The most dominant minority was African American at 7%. Hispanics represented ½ of 1% in 1990. By 1998 Kentucky's population had grown by 6%. The white population had dropped very slightly to 91%. A growth of .2% was noted in the Hispanic population with no change in the African American statistics.

Religion and geography have played major roles in the politics of the commonwealth (Miller, 1994). While Kentucky is predominantly Protestant, the distribution of religious denominations is peculiarly geographic and traces along migration patterns (Elazar, 1984, 1994; Miller, 1994).

The migration patterns are dictated by geography. Early18th century pioneers, led by Daniel Boone, moved from North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia westward across the Appalachian mountain range through the Cumberland Gap. Later 19th century migrants moved from the Northeastern US following the Ohio River to the Mississippi. Kentucky was a prominent national influence in the US through the Civil War, but after that its political influence waned nationally as its economic growth stalled.

The legacy of Kentucky's political culture for most of the 20th century has been often stereotyped in the national press and in current literature and movies (Caudill, 1969; Miller, 1994). After the Civil War, Kentucky was in the odd position of military occupation although it never seceded from the Union. In a significant statement of political culture, note that Kentucky voted for secession after the Civil War over.

The legacy of Reconstruction included inadequate support for social or economic development. Furthermore, Kentucky's shift from an agrarian to an industrial economy was not initiated until the 1940s (Miller, 1994). The heritage of this economic isolation has been significantly evident in Kentucky's education system and in data on intergenerational illiteracy throughout the 20th century (Combs, 1991; Caudill, 1969).

By the 1980s, there were no data for any Kentucky school, district or county that suggested adequate political, legislative or governmental support for the commonwealth's public schools regardless of any absolute national standard or even relative state-by-state norms (Combs, 1991; Dove, 1991). These conditions were not merely an historical heritage; they were and are a political and cultural legacy.

Again, Elazar's (1984, 1994) framework is usefully explanatory. Given this history as well as the demographics of migration, economic standing, and religion, Kentucky's political culture fits Elazar's elitist traditional subculture. In this type of political culture, distinct differences in socio-economic status, a fundamental belief in authority, and persistent agrarian values combine to establish Kentucky's politics as both centralized and strongly supportive of the *status quo* (Elazar, 1994; Miller, 1994). This

description of Kentucky's political culture is essential to understanding the phenomena of school reform as it has played out over the last decade. The framework is also, at least partially useful, to the purposes of this paper, which are to describe the continuing debate over high stakes assessment and accountability in Kentucky's public schools.

Authentic Policy Analysis

The other framework, which is necessary for our analysis, is one posited by Cibulka and Derlin (1998). They term their model for policy analysis, an authentic model. It is a hybrid of three perspectives of policy development including institutional theory, rational choice, and interpretation (Cibulka & Derlin, 1998, p. 81). Again, this approach is useful given Kentucky's political culture and the history of the current debate about high stakes educational accountability.

Cibulka and Derlin argue that the credibility requirements of educational accountability systems require a multifaceted approach to analyzing such policies. The contributions of institutional theory are necessary to account for the integrated nature of education systems with their cultures. Rational choice theory is the dominant *modus operandi* of policy makers. Interpretive theory accounts for the local influence of the change process long-noted by various authors as ascendant in policy implementation (Cibulka & Derlin, 1998; Hall & Hord, 1987; McLaughlin, 1987). Each of these perspectives offers insight into the analysis of educational accountability policy.

Institutional theory. Institutional theory has evolved to explain a growing preoccupation with the relationship between social conflict and social institutions (Knight, 1992; Crowson, Boyd and Mawhinney, 1996). When considered in simplistic elements, institutions represent a social contract for addressing particular cultural functions (Eggerston as cited in Knight, 1992, p. 108). Thus, it follows that policies derive from institutions to legitimate their social contracts (Cibulka, 1996; Cibulka & Derlin, 1998; Ginsberg, 1996; Knight, 1992). Implementation of such policy is necessary to maintain public support (Cibulka & Derlin, 1998).

Rational choice. At the point of implementation, Cibulka and Derlin (1998) argue that implementers are moved to rationalize the steps of policy achievement. The rational choice model is heavy in economic terms of maximizing cost-benefit ratios (March & Olson, 1989.) Nevertheless, rational planning focuses attention on the technical details of

implementation — a feature useful to policy implementers (Cibulka & Derlin, 1998; Ginsberg, 1996; Hamilton, 1991). Yet, rationality is not sufficient to encompass the analysis of policy implementation in social institutions (Ginsberg, 1996; Hamilton, 1991).

Interpretive perspectives. Too much about change is subject to micro-level adaptations (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976; McLaughlin, 1987). An interpretive perspective allows policy implementation analysis to feature the individual adaptations that derive from policy making to policy outcomes (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Cibulka & Derlin, 1996; Hamilton, 1991). Thus the perspectives of the participants have enormous influence on the success of the policy.

All three of these perspectives are useful in the current recording of Kentucky's educational accountability debate. The institutional perspective is particularly explicative of Kentucky's radical systemic reform of its public education system. As will be seen in the following data presentation, rational choices are still used in protecting the economic and social ends for the policy implementation of Kentucky's legislated reforms. Furthermore, the ensuing debate is shaped by individualistic interpretation of policy impact. Finally, all of these perspectives exist in the context of Kentucky's historically traditional and elitist political culture.

Methods, Techniques or Modes of Inquiry

The paper is a typical political, policy analysis in that it relies on extant documents, media reports, and interviews of key players to expand our understanding of a salient issue (Johnson & Joslyn, 1991; Rist, 19994; Shulman, 1988). The paper reports primary and secondary focus group and interview data from a variety of professional educators and parents, who are typically less directly engaged in such historic controversy

Data Sources or Evidence

Multiple data sources were used for this paper. Various versions of proposed and enacted legislation from the 1998 session of the Kentucky General Assembly were collected and reviewed. Copies of documents circulated to legislators by fellow

lawmakers and lobbying organizations were analyzed. Legislative committee session were observed and scripted. Data were gleaned from interviews with legislators, appointed state board and committee members, state education employees, and representatives of statewide organizations. Print and electronic media reports also provided data for this paper. Data also were collected from in-person written responses to survey questions and focus groups held with teachers and other school personnel and parents[2]. The survey questions and focus group questions replicated and expanded on questions submitted by the Kentucky Department of Education to subcommittees and advisory groups tasked with redefining Kentucky's educational accountability system. Data were coded for common themes and triangulated across groups and types of data. Data were also reviewed for discrepant cases and divergent views (Hodder, 1994; Huberman & Miles, 1994; Merriam, 1991; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The Record of Kentucky's On-going Debate on Educational Accountability

At this writing, decision-making is driven by a limited timeline. The constraints of time both spur and undermine the political culture for consensus.

Given the turbulence of this policy debate, the record currently shows some persisting and emerging themes in educational accountability. It is the ambitious intention of this paper to capture those themes for the moment in the hopes of establishing the record. Two persisting themes occupy the debate currently: (1) the tension between the drive for educational professionalism and the political press for accountability and (2) the complexity of educational assessment with public demand for simplicity and fairness. A transient (possibly recurring) theme is the divergence of perspectives on continuous school improvement. Each of these themes will be described as they emerge through chronological description of Kentucky's educational assessment and accountability history and then addressed more thoroughly in the discussion and conclusion sections.

Kentucky's Educational Assessment and Accountability History

[2] Some of the data were available through traditional sources of public polls and opinion summaries. Interestingly, technology made other data available through websites established by parents and professionals specifically focused on Kentucky's assessment, accountability and systemic reform.

Narratives of the impetus for Kentucky's 1990 systemic reform legislation exist in volumes elsewhere (e.g. Alexander, 1990; Steffy, 1993). For the purposes of this work, I will focus on the inception of the accountability strand of reform.

An important feature of the 1989 Kentucky Supreme Court decision was its adoption of educational goals for Kentucky's public schools defined through citizen meetings (Alexander, 1990). One key demand from these meetings was that "schools must expect a high level of achievement of all students" (Legislative Research Commission, 1991, p.28). This expectation was recently affirmed in a belief statement issued by the Kentucky State Board of Education that "all children can learn, given adequate opportunity and support" (Kentucky Department of Education, 1998).

In 1989, the then-Governor of Kentucky, Wallace Wilkinson, appointed a Task Force composed of Kentucky legislators to draft the 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act. The Task Force agreed to 12 principles for designing systemic reform. The very first principle reiterates the Kentucky education reform mantra that "all students can learn and nearly all at high levels" (Task Force, 1989, p. 1). In this manner, the court findings and the legislative process incorporated the citizens' goals for public education.

No less than half of the Task Force's principles made some reference to assessment and accountability as a performance-based system of high standards with rewards for success and help for lack of success. One of these principles acknowledged that accountability and autonomy were intertwined. Once the unit of school was defined as the focus of accountability, autonomy was assigned to school based decision-making councils composed of teachers, parents, and the principal. Another principle addressed the importance of teacher capacity in a performance-based system (Task Force on Educational Reform, 1989). (See appendix A). The seeds for professionalism with accountability were sewn in both the judicial and legislative deliberative processes.

However, it is a peculiarity of the Kentucky legislative process that incomplete written records are kept during deliberations or testimony. While every session of every committee and each house of the General Assembly is videotaped, none of this is transcribed into hard copy. Minutes are now kept for the record, but much of what happened during the 1990 legislative session in the development of reform must be

reconstructed by watching tapes and/or taking oral histories from those involved (Steffy, 1993).

Due to this legislative records process, little institutional memory remains among legislators in 1999 of what transpired in 1989 and 1990. Much of the General Assembly's leadership responsible for the historic legislation of 1990 has changed. There have been three governors in the passage of time. Additionally, the chief justice of the Kentucky Supreme Court recently retired. Though the work of reform shifted rapidly from the General Assembly to the Kentucky Department of Education, it is important to note the interim changes between KDE's development and implementation of an assessment and accountability system and the changes in legislative, executive and judicial political leadership.

Besides the transience of political leadership, one must also mark the fickle nature of public opinion. The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence was instrumental in conducting the aforementioned judicially instigated citizens' hearings on education. Despite the dominant call for high expectations for all students at the time of the court decision and the legislative draft of school reform, as much as six years later, the Prichard Committee noted that there was little agreement "among teachers and the public, ... of the goal 'that all children can learn and most at high levels'" (Prichard Committee, 1995, p. xii).

The public's fickle stance on high expectations is not just a temporal phenomenon in Kentucky. To the extent that a traditional, elitist political culture prefers a clearly divided and hierarchical socioeconomic class system, teachers' and the public's resistance to the notion that all students can learn at high levels is not surprising. Along with the Prichard Committee's reports of inadequate expectations from the public, came frequent laments from educators that even if all children could learn at high levels, "who would work at MacDonalds?" (Field notes, constantly ☺). 'xcuse, me! Kentucky's notoriously low literacy rates may have generated the clarion call for school reform, but its remote rural populations are sharply economically divided among the rural poor—the illiterate and the literate — most of whom are teachers (Kentucky Youth Advocates & Research Center for Families and children, 1996).

The formation of the assessment and accountability system was the legal responsibility of the State Board of Education, but the management responsibility of the Kentucky Department of Education. The assessment and accountability system was contracted with Advanced Systems in Measurement and Evaluation, Inc., and Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development. By the spring of 1992, a baseline assessment including multiple choice items, open-response items, writing portfolios and performance events was administered to students in 4th, 8th, and 12th grades. Accountability at the school level was to account five-sixths of the "success" formula to the test and one-sixth on schools measures of attendance, dropouts, retention in grade, and for high schools, successful transition to adult life (defined as enrollment in post-secondary education or the military, and, after some debate, homemaking) (Petrosko, 1997; Steffy, 1993). The 1992 baseline established a floor for school performance that was projected over twenty years. Each school worked against its own baseline on a biennial projection of future performance to meet the 20-year target (Kentucky Department of Education, 1993).

From 1992-94, students continued to take the test, but the rewards and sanctions were delayed. Rewards became available to schools who exceeded their projected performance by 1% in 1994. For some teachers, the distribution of rewards was their first signal that the legislature was quite serious about school reform (Field notes, 1996). Kentucky's General Assembly had often passed legislation with money for educational reforms in the past only to remove the funding in its next session (Caudill, 1963; Legislative Research Commission, 1990; Lindle, 1995; Miller, 1994).

For other teachers, the rewards were debilitating. Teachers felt the entire assessment and accountability system was stressful (Borko & Elliott, 1999; Winograd, Petrosko, Compton-Hall & Cantrell, 1997; Wolf & McIver, 1999). Some thought the rewards were too small to be much of an incentive, while others found the notion of rewards-for-teaching professionally insulting (Abelman & Kenyon, 1996; Kannapel, Coe, Aagaard & Moore, 1996; Kelley & Protsik, 1996).

The sanctions portion of accountability did not take effect until 1996. As noted in the original Task Force's Principles (1989), unsuccessful schools should receive help and teachers were not to be the unit of accountability:

> There should be a spectrum of consequences. The challenge is to have alternatives and use them in ways that are more sensitive and less blunt, making certain that all parties understand the repertoire of rewards and sanctions and the circumstances which give rise to each. The successful should be rewarded; the unsuccessful should be helped. (p.2)

Despite this intent, the legislation was viewed as highly punitive. Kentucky Revised Statue (KRS) 158.6455 did establish a range of consequences for schools defined as successful to those defined as "in crises". The distribution of rewards was mandated. The provisions for schools that were not improving were to develop an improvement plan and receive state funding. Schools that declined more than 5% from their baselines were to be "school-in-crisis." These schools had several sanctions in addition to the planning requirements and supplemental funds:

- Full and part-time staff were to be placed on probation
- Principals (by 1998, the superintendent) were to notify parents that their students had a right to transfer to a more successful school
- One or more Kentucky Distinguished Educators (DE) should be assigned to the school by the Kentucky Department of Education and within six months shall evaluate the staff and recommend termination(s) to the superintendent (KRS § 158.6455 ¶ (5) (a) - (e), ¶ (6)-(8))

Despite the fact that these sanctions were never used until 1996, these provisions were viewed as highly threatening. Teachers reported that they changed their teaching practices because they were afraid of losing their jobs (Abelman & Kenyon, 1996; Kelley & Protsik, 1996). Others noted changing their practices to address the test (Borko & Elliott, 1999).

In 1996 only 9 schools (0.6% of all schools in KY) were identified as "in-crisis." During the sanctioned period of 1996-98, no one was terminated on the recommendation of a DE.

DEs were assigned to schools beginning in 1994 to provide assistance in school planning. During the period from 1994 through 1996, DEs functioned in a supportive

role to 53 schools struggling with accountability and assessment (Davis, McDonald & Lyons, 1997). Of those 53 schools, 16 (30%) were still working with DEs in the 1996-98 biennium. But by 1998, only 4 (2%) schools' scores were still slipping. This represents a 98% success rate over four years.

The 1996-98 biennium found 177 schools eligible for DE services with the aforementioned nine schools requiring the severest sanctions. By 1998, 88% of these schools had earned rewards. Given the combined success of 93% with schools from both biennia, the DE program would appear to be a smashing success (Davis, 1999; Davis, McDonald & Lyons, 1997).

In some quarters the DE program was hailed as a new and perhaps more effective form of professional development (McDiarmid, David, Kannapel, Corcoran, & Coe, 1997). The question of effective professional development is germane to Kentucky's reform. Teachers generated persistent cries of "more time" and more training given the comprehensive nature of the reforms (Cody & Guskey, 1997; Lindle, 1998b; Prichard Committee, 1995). While funding for professional development increased significantly in 1990, the state and local capacity efforts were so decentralized that many questioned their effectiveness (Appalachian Education Lab, 1995; Cody & Guskey, 1997; Lindle, 1998b; McDiarmid, David, Kannapel, Corcoran, & Coe, 1997). If the DE program was turning schools around, it could indicate a better model of professional development.

Yet, not everyone was satisfied. Groups of teachers and school administrators complained that DEs took a cursory and high-handed approach to improving schools (Holland, 1997; Lawson, 1997; Henry, Terry & Lunney, 1998). But the most devastating aspect of the accountability system, according to some, was merely reading the name of your school on the list of unsuccessful schools in the newspaper (Holland, 1997; Kelley, 1998; Lawson, 1997; Field Notes: Educational Assessment and Accountability Review Subcommittee, 4/1/99).

Dropping on to that list of "bad" schools was particularly galling to some. The accountability system used a continuous improvement model. That is, possessing the highest scores among schools in a district or the state was not enough to obtain Kentucky's "successful" designation. Schools had to improve against themselves, constantly. Consequently some schools could fall into the declining categories while

holding higher scores than other schools receiving rewards. To those who viewed relative success as important, a continuous improvement model was illogical and probably impossible for "good" schools to sustain (Holland, 1997; Lawson, 1997; Prichard Committee, 1995).

Parents found another way in which logic of the assessment and accountability system failed them. Students, who consistently made good grades and did well on standardized tests, often did poorly on the authentic assessment portions of the Kentucky assessment. One set of parents filed suit on religious grounds against the state for administering the test, but lost (Zirkel, 1998). Others protested reform in general, but offered no other remedy for school system problems (Holland, 1998). One explanation for the problem of parent perceptions shows up in almost every report on Kentucky's reform noting inadequate levels of both parent interest and attention to parent involvement (Davis, 1999; Prichard Committee, 1995; Schaver, 1994).

Parents also were concerned over the limited individual student information available in Kentucky's tests. Despite a legislative requirement that the tests be both individually diagnostic and evaluative of school performance (KRS § 158.6455), measurement experts were beginning to announce that such duality was probably unlikely (Catterrall, Mehrens, Ryan, Flores, & Rubin, 1998).

This revelation was just part of the scholarly concerns about the usual dilemmas of educational measurement. At least 18 technical reports on the Kentucky Assessment had been produced by the time the 1998 General Assembly session began (Petrosko, 1997). The Kentucky Legislature's Office of Educational Accountability (OEA) had been among the first to challenge the test development, validity and reliability by commissioning an independent report (Hambleton, Jaeger, Koretz, Linn, Millman, & Phillips, 1995; Waldrop, 1998). While the ensuing reports generated legitimate concerns about the tests' reliability, the issues of reliability and validity on both normed and criterion measures are a constant source of debate among measurement specialists (Phye, 1997; Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1995). Herein lies the rational predicament for Kentucky's legislature in trying to legislate and manage educational reform from a technical perspective.

Kentucky General Assembly's session schedule reflects its political culture. It maintains an essentially agrarian calendar by meeting every two years from January through March for about ninety days (Miller, 1994). The debate on Kentucky's assessment and accountability lasted at least a year and a half in the run up to and during the entire 1998 session. Unquestionably the institution of sanctions in 1996 was the catalyst for the debate. While teachers and parents together lobbied for change, the teachers' issue was primarily the accountability system (Carrico, 1998) and the parents were primarily concerned about assessment (Lindle, 1998a); yet, both issues overlapped (Brewer, 1998; Prichard Committee, 1995). The threat to accountability was substantial enough to rouse response from former-governor Wilkinson (1998), "There is no reform without accountability" (p. F2).

The initial bill for addressing the issue was one that completely and permanently dismantled assessment and accountability (Lindle, 1998a). Another bill was introduced to restructure the test with a nationally normed multiple choice portion to be added to the assessment, but would dismantle accountability. Schools could decide if they wanted "Highly Skilled Assistance." In the end, a string of assessment and accountability changes were tacked onto a relatively insignificant bill, House Bill 53, that had originally proposed awarding diplomas posthumously.

The final provisions included:

- Three new advisory groups speak to the Kentucky Board of Education on assessment and accountability:
  - ✓ The Office of Educational Accountability,
  - ✓ The second group consists of most of the assessment experts who have ever reviewed Kentucky's original system and it is known as the National Technical Advisory Panel (NTAP).
  - ✓ The School Curriculum, Assessment & Accountability Council (SCAAC) which includes representatives from various constituencies including teachers, parents, and others.
- The Kentucky General Assembly maintains oversight of the accountability and assessment system. They include part of the General Assembly known as the Education Assessment & Accountability Review subcommittee (EAARS).

- The Kentucky State Board is required to develop a school report card.
- The Kentucky State Board will determine accountability with advice from the three committees. Two accountability formulas will be developed: one for the interim CATS test development and one for 2000 through 2020.
- Rewards are now distributed to school councils rather than teachers.
- Sanctions have been modified to include
  - ✓ Scholastic audit (may mitigate imposition of sanctions)
  - ✓ Assistance from Highly Skilled Educators (replaces DEs)
  - ✓ Evaluation of school personnel
  - ✓ Student transfer rights
- The new test components will include the following
  - 3 Reliable and valid scores for school *and student accountability*
  - 3 Continued teacher involvement in test item design
  - 3 Inclusion of nationally normed testing for accountability
  - 3 Reduction of testing time for schools and students
  - 3 Longitudinal measures of individual student progress
  - 3 Timely reporting of assessment results to schools and students.
  - 3 Report of test results no later than September 15th of the following year

Since the bill was passed in 1998, the three committees and the State Board of Education have worked diligently to implement HB 53. CTB McGraw Hill, Data Recognition and WestEd won the testing contract and immediately began development for the 1999 administration of the test.

NTAP has met several times alone and in consultation with Kentucky Department of Education officials and the Kentucky State Board. Their debate has been the discussion of continuous school improvement versus the recognition of "standing." Standing is defined as the relative strength of a school's scores in relation to other schools. The State Board and EAARS are trying to adopt a blend of continuous improvement and recognition of standing. Standing is an important concept in the traditional and elitist political culture of Kentucky. In contrast, continuous improvement is a necessary rational adaptation of policy given Kentucky's relative educational deficits.

Fairness and simplicity are the watchwords for the "new" accountability formula. Members of the Kentucky Department of Education run simulations on previous assessment data. Meanwhile, NTAP and the State Board try out different accountability formulas. So far, the need for a "simple" formula contradicts the requirement for a "fair" formula (field notes, 12/8/98). Even the calculation of an interim "simple" regression model challenged both NTAP's and Legislators' abilities to articulate the plan to the public.

Recently, EAARS met to discuss the interim accountability model. NTAP proposed and the State Board accepted a "simple" regression model. Instead of predicting the appropriate score for determining school success, each school's performances will be calculated and then weighed against other schools within the same baseline score bracket. The legislative members of EAARS were not sanguine about this proposal. "So in the interim, we're grading on a curve," said one. "Do we have to put up with a model in this transition in which a certain number of schools must fail?" asked another (Field notes, 4/1/99).

There's no denouement to this saga. The question of how to address failing schools in Kentucky, is mired in finding a politically acceptable definition of failure. Interestingly, the policy approach has been somewhat inter-institutional, continuously appealing to the rational, and almost always thwarted by interpretation.

Discussion

As noted in the results, two persistent themes and one possibly recurring them emerged from the chronology of Kentucky educational assessment and accountability debate. Each will be explored in more depth with the perspectives of political culture and the authentic analysis frameworks.

Persistent Theme (1): Professionalism vs. Public Accountability

The culture of professional educators also emerges in this debate as a political influence. Given Kentucky's dismal literacy rate, teachers in many of its rural communities are both the best-educated and best-paid citizens. Given the socio-economic divisions in Kentucky's community, professionalism demands that teachers gain more autonomy and free themselves from regulation by less educated citizens.

In the extreme, teachers wonder: "Why do we have to ask permission [or be told] to do what we know is right? The public counters with: Why can't you ask first?" (Urschel cited in Holland, 1998, p.127).

Despite the rational plan that accountability be tied to autonomy, the connection between School-Based Decision Making and accountability is not strong enough in perceptions about Kentucky's reform. As one teacher noted, "This isn't as high stakes for parents as it is for me" (Field notes, 7/3/97). Student accountability was added to the mix in the resulting 1998 legislation. The emerging positions suggest that accountability should be "spread around," but each group seems to demand exclusive rights to autonomy. It is a mark of Kentucky's traditional political culture that teachers may manage to establish the greatest legitimacy in demands for autonomy.

Persistent Theme (2):
Educational Complexity vs. Public Simplicity & Fairness

Educational measurement issues defy public understanding. Accounts of the public desire to reduce descriptions of educational performance to letter grades are practically legend. We achieved this dilemma from the point where Alfred Binet administered his first IQ test and things have not improved.

To the extent that fairness and simplicity are political tools for rationality, it seems odd that the place where rationality breaks down in Kentucky's educational policy process is in the most technical features of the plan. NTAP has not abandoned its standards for fairness, but the Kentucky School Board and General Assembly members nearly always respond with an observation of how complex NTAP's proposals are.

It may be that the only escape from this dilemma is a culturally defined understanding of "simplicity." Yet, in Kentucky, where literacy in all subjects, not just reading is an issue, such a cultural definition may be too stringent to allow the technical complexity required by fairness.

Possible Recurring Theme:
Continuous School Improvement

In an elitist, traditional political culture the questions of who has the relative power translates, in this issue of school performance, into who has the highest scores on

the test. This question of relative standing is as salient for parents and students as it is for teachers. It is undergirded by both the political legitimacy and policy interpretation attached to the Kentucky reform motto: All children can learn.

This perspective (and interpretation) raises a number of questions about the feasibility of continuous improvement. For example: If you are at the top, then why do you need to improve? And if you are at the top, is it possible to get any more performance out of high performers? As the debate rages, participants are driven to ask, "Hasn't anyone else done this right?"

Teacher efficacy and capacity are embedded in the answers to these questions. A rational policy response would be to increase the professional development opportunities for teachers. The current governor of Kentucky, Paul Patton, and the General Assembly has formed still another Task Force to examine "Teacher Quality." Professional development is part of the Task Force's agenda (Brammer, 1999; Harp, 1999; Kentucky Department of Education, 1999; Field notes, 2/26/99).

Another policy response might be to reorient the question of progress from whole school units to sub units in the manner found in Texas. There, schools are not successful unless every child makes progress, not just a few of the high-performing students scoring high enough to statistically pull up overall school scores. The question is whether or not the political culture of Kentucky would support this approach.

Finally, the recurring issue of continuous improvement is one fundamental to accountability policy designs (Fuhrman, 1999). Numerous examples at the state level show the difficulty of using tests to establish high educational standards (Massell, 1997; Taylor, 1994). High stakes create unintended consequences such as cheating and inordinate fears about job security or academic freedom (Kelley, 1998; Stecklow, 1997). Furthermore, high stakes create political responses to accountability. Kentucky's reaction to four years of rewards and two years of sanctions was a near dismantling of its accountability and assessment system.

Conclusion

The combined frameworks of political culture and authentic policy perspectives are useful for depicting the story of Kentucky's debate over accountability and

assessment. Political culture emerges as a defining influence on Kentucky's educational accountability debate. Kentucky does not have a diverse population in terms of race or ethnicity, but tends to divide itself socio-economically and regionally. Social status morés affected public views on accountability standards. Professional culture also impacted interpretation of policy for accountability. While the institutions of the legislature and the public school system combine to address the question of school performance, rational planning is constantly challenged by interpretations. The interpretive influence is perhaps another means of demonstrating the power of political culture.

Whither assessment and accountability given Kentucky's experience? Of course, the answer specific for Kentucky is emergent. But what we have learned from experience is that fixing failing schools has enormous political overtones. Definitions of school success and failure must be a consensus of what is fair and for public consumption, what is simple to understand. The power of professional culture must not be underestimated in this equation. While the struggle to fix Kentucky's schools continues, it's clear from surveying the other fifty states, that no one else has figured it out for the commonwealth given its culture and history.

Appendix A

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

Task Force on Education Reform
1989

We will make numerous important decisions in the next several months. The cumulative impact of those decisions will shape Kentucky's future. Understanding the magnitude and significance of the task, we believe it important to identify a series of principles which can serve as standards against which we will measure our work. We will be open to adding to, deleting from, or amending the principles, but we must begin our work with clarity of direction these Principles provides.

I. All students can learn and nearly all at high levels. Our belief system must include the perspective that all or nearly all students can learn at high levels. Otherwise, we are doomed to fail with many since expectations translate into self-fulfilling prophecies. If one expects a discernible portion of students to fail, one will encounter the first students with whom one has difficulty and identify that student as one of those who cannot learn when measured against rigorous criteria. That student will be abandoned. Soon a second will join the initial failed child, and then another and another.

II. We know how to successfully teach all students. This is obviously not true for every teacher in every school. This principle simply acknowledges that there are teachers and schools that are successful in serving children from every conceivable background --- rich and poor, children of every color, the disabled and those who are not, those for whom English is not their first language and those for whom it is. What works is a matter of knowledge, not opinion. It is not a mystery. The challenge is not the challenge of discovery, it is the challenge of equipping all school staff with the knowledge to act successfully.

III. Curriculum content must reflect high expectations and instructional strategies must be successful ones. What children learn should be commonly challenging. We should provide a rigorous curriculum to all, not dumbed-down curriculum to some. How we teach, where teaching and learning occur, when teaching and learning take place, and who teaches should be different for different students, classrooms and schools. The variability should be governed by what works. When we fail with a child, a classroom or with a school, we must adopt the attitude that we do not yet have the proper mix of how, where, when and who.

IV. Ours must be a performance-based system. Too often the question we ask our schools is, "Did you do what you were told?" The right question is, "Did it work?" Trying hard must no longer be sufficient. What students actually know and can do is what counts.

V. Ours must be a system in which school performance results in appropriate consequences. When schools succeed, rarely are their staff or the schools as institutions rewarded. When schools fail, rarely are their staff or the schools as institutions sanctioned. In measuring success, we believer the schools should be the primary unit of measurement, not individual teachers. There should be a spectrum of consequences. The challenge is to have alternatives and use them in ways that are more sensitive and less blunt, making certain that all parties understand the repertoire of rewards and sanctions and the circumstances which give rise to each. The successful should be rewarded; the unsuccessful should be helped.

VI. School-based staff should have a mojor role in shaping instructional strategies. Who among us is prepared to assume accountability for our actions if we have little control over those actions? Who among us can legitimately deny our accountability if we have the authority and means to act? School accountability and school-based authority are two intertwined parts of the same proposition.

VII. School staff must have the capacity to make good instructional decisions. Higher expectations will not happen magically. The corporate community knows that a strong, outcome-oriented staff development and training effort is essential meeting its bottom line objectives; school systems must realize this too.

VIII. Non-essential regulations must be reduced significantly. The rhetoric of school based management is empty if we bureaucratically impede or frustrate decisions with layers of process.

IX. Schools have responsibility for home and community outreach. The home has a strong schools support role. Parents and guardians have the responsibility, for example, of making clear that schooling is highly valued, of assuring students attendance, of creating the expectation that children and youth will study appropriately, and helping the school with behaviors issues. Some instructional strategies may require the involvement and cooperation of the community beyond the school. Some children will require health and other social service support to be successful in school. The school has an important role in coordinating these multiple community contacts in order to secure parental and community help in fulfilling its mission.

X. What is tested will heavily influence what is taught. This principle requires that our assessment efforts be as rich and varied and multi-dimensional as the high outcome expectations we have for our children.

XI. Learning begins early and does not end with high school graduation. Anyone who has watched a child from birth knows what extraordinary physical and mental leaps most children make early. We know that significant mental development has occurred by the time a child enters kindergarten or the first grade. We know that children develop at different rates, rates which can be influenced by their environment. We also know that children today will change jobs six times and occupations three times as adults. They will be well served by the ability to continue learning for a lifetime.

XII. There is a need to provide for a measure of independent assessment and enforcement authority. Staff at the local and state level must monitor the outcomes of school performance. They must be prepared to make adjustments to ensure successful performance. Teachers will assess and alter instructional practice as often as daily for some children. School systems must provide assistance to school-based staff and even from the State Department of Education, universities and, perhaps, other entities will in pare results from examining school performance and being prepared to intervene. There are many forms that the independent and assessment authority can take. The point is not to suggest one or more particular instructional performance oversight vehicles at this time or to describe the breadth or character of circumstances that would lead to their use. The point is to articulate the principle that the oversight of the system should include mechanisms beyond the system itself.

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